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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ZAGREB 000615

SIPDIS

FOR EUR/SCE, EUR/PPD, EUR/RPM AND EUR/ERA  
OSD FOR POPOVICH

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: ZAGREB WEEKLY ACTIVITY REPORT - AUGUST 22, 2008

11. (U) CROATIA COMPLETES PROCEDURES FOR ENTRY INTO FORCE OF SOFA:

In a Diplomatic Note dated August 20, the Croatian Government has informed the Department that all internal Croatian procedures for entry into force of the bilateral US-Croatia Status of Forces Agreement have been completed. This comes after publication of the Croatian Parliament's proclamation ratifying the agreement was published in Croatia's "Narodne Novine" (Official Register) on August 13. The SOFA's entry into force marks the successful conclusion of a several-year long negotiating process is brought to a successful conclusion. (RHoltzapple)

12. (U) INCREASED CROATIAN ISAF CONTINGENT DEPLOYS TO AFGHANISTAN:

On August 20, the Ministry of Defense held a departure ceremony for the 12th contingent of Croatian soldiers to deploy to the ISAF Mission in Afghanistan. The deployment, which was covered by the local press, is part of the scheduled rotation that sees an increase of their contingent from 200 to nearly 300 peacekeepers to ISAF in 2008. The head of the Defense Policy Division, Pjer Simunovic, noted in his remarks that the deployment was a continuation of Croatia's successful engagement in Afghanistan and that the efforts of the Croatian armed forces in ISAF are valued both domestically and by the international community. The troops are scheduled to physically depart Croatia this weekend, with US airlift assistance. (PD'Amico)

13. (U) MEDIA MOSTLY CRITICAL OF RUSSIAN ROLE IN GEORGIA, BUT MORE INTERESTED IN CONTRASTING ATTITUDES OF PRESIDENT AND GOVERNMENT:

The crisis in Georgia continues to receive prominent coverage in Croatian media. The majority of Croatian coverage condemned the Russian intervention, however, some recent articles have also cast blame on Georgian President Saakashvili for provoking the conflict. In addition, Russia's local Ambassador has been in the press with interviews arguing that "Georgia, Not Russia, is Guilty of Aggression" and "It is Not Russia's Goal To Occupy Georgia." Most recent reporting has been highlighting the perceived differences in the approach of President Mesic and Prime Minister Sanader's government to the crisis. Reports have noted that, while FM Jandrokovic was attending the NAC Ministerial this week and making statements in support of Georgia's territorial integrity, President Mesic and his office were writing letters to Croatia's UN Mission and issuing press releases stressing the need not only to end hostilities but to avoid isolating Russia and stating that "instead of breaking off contacts, we should be working on intensifying them." (KWetzel/RHoltzapple)

14. (U) PRESIDENT CRITICIZES OPPOSITION LEADER'S PLANNED VISIT TO BLEIBURG:

Social Democratic Party (SDP) president, Zoran Milanovic,

announced plans last week to visit the town of Bleiburg, Austria, as the head of a delegation which will include prominent leaders and historians from the Croatian Jewish community. The stated intent of Milanovic's trip is to show balance in SDP's approach to crimes committed during WWII regardless of the victim. Bleiburg is the city where fleeing Ustasa prisoners of war (pro-fascist/pro-Nazi collaborators) and other civilian refugees were handed over by British allied forces to Yugoslav Communist Partisans at the end of WWII. The returnees were forced to march from Bleiburg back to Yugoslavia under harsh conditions. A large, though disputed, number were executed or died along the way. President Mesic, who has refused to attend Bleiburg commemorations in the past, described the proposal as "premature" and "rash," arguing that Milanovic's trip would give Bleiburg -- many of whose victims were guilty of atrocities against Jews, Serbs, and Roma -- an equal status to that of Jasenovac (site of the largest concentration camp in Croatia during WWII). Mesic called instead for more research to be done to establish the identities of the victims at Bleiburg and the circumstances of their deaths. (JNCallahan)

15. (U) CROATIA SAYS GLOBAL TERRORISM TO BE UNSC THEME IN DECEMBER:

According to press reports, the Croatian Foreign Ministry has agreed that the theme of it's December Presidency of the UN Security Council will be Global Terrorism. No further details were available, but this theme was likely chosen as a complement to Croatia's continuing chairmanship of the UNSC's Counterterrorism Committee. Post will seek more details on Croatian plans for December once senior policy makers have returned from the summer break next week. (RHoltzapple)

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